

The Most Colorful Dragon

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Category: Lord of the Rings

Language: English

Characters: Bilbo B., Frodo B., Peregrin T.

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-04-09 16:19:13

Updated: 2016-04-09 16:19:13

Packaged: 2016-04-27 21:12:27

Rating: K

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,247

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Five year old Pippin comes to Bag End for a visit, hoping for an adventure. But when a freak snowstorm keeps everyone inside, he and Frodo have to find a different way of adventuring. One-shot. No slash, sex, profanity, or violence. No plot, either, just hobbity cuteness.

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Author's note: This one-shot was inspired by the snowstorm we had a few days ago. I was all set to plant parts of my garden, then we got four inches of snow! I think Mother Nature was playing an April Fool's joke on us, only she got the date wrong. I was very disappointed, and took my frustration out on our favorite hobbits, who would be equally saddened by unexpected bad weather.

In this story, Frodo is twenty-seven years old and has been living with Bilbo for a few years. Pippin is five, and is merely visiting for a few days.

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><p>"Want to go outside!" Pippin demanded. Frodo sighed. His little cousin was usually a happy child, rarely disobedient or prone to fits of temper, and always willing to be persuaded by the hope of a story, a new game, or something special at teatime.</p>

Not today. Pippin had it in his head that Bag End was boring, and anywhere outside the hole was _the_ place to spend the day. Normally, Frodo wouldn't have minded- he liked to ramble about outside as much as any other young hobbit- but today was not the occasion for spending any time away from a warm fire and a cup of tea. It was springtime, but a surprise storm had blown in early that morning, leaving a deluge of rain, snow, and ice in its wake. It wasn't simply uncomfortable to be outside; it could be dangerous, so Frodo said, as

calmly as he could manage, "No, dearest. We have to wait until the storm is gone. See the sleet falling on the window? You wouldn't that to be falling down your neck, would you?" as he reached out and tickled his cousin under his curls. Pippin squealed and jumped away from the questing hand. Frodo had a knack for reducing ticklish people to tears of laughter.

"Not nice, Frodo," he said, then returned to his original point all the tenacity a five year old hobbit lad could muster. "I want to run around and play. Uncle Bilbo's reading and he wants it quiet."

"And you want to go outside so you don't disturb Uncle Bilbo?" Frodo asked. Pippin nodded earnestly. "That's very kind of you, dearest, but I think it would disturb Uncle even more if you caught a chill and spent the rest of your visit coughing and sneezing. So we'll have to find something inside to do."

"Like what?" Pippin asked.

"Wellâ€œ!" Frodo pretended to think, tapping a finger against his chin in an exaggeration of a puzzled hobbit. Pippin giggled. "We could make cookies," Frodo suggested.

"We made cookies yesterday," Pippin argued. "Bag End will be stuffed full of cookies if we make any more!"

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" Frodo said, grinning. "A hole full of cookies. When your parents come to bring you back to Tuckborough, they'll open the door and be buried under an avalanche of tasty sweet things!" He pretended to think again. "We could build a tent of blankets and pretend we're on a camping trip."

Pippin shook his head. "Then we have to sit under the tent, and I don't want to sit."

Frodo frowned exaggeratedly to make Pippin laugh, but his frustration was real. It was just after luncheon and they had already read a story, tidied Pippin's room, cleared away the last of the dirty dishes, tried to count snowflakes, and drawn patterns in the frost on the windows. He was running out of ways to keep Pippin occupied and had been hoping to spend some time outside, running about, naming the newly-emerging flowers in the garden, or maybe even walking to Bywater Pond to see if the ducks were still there. But those adventures would have to wait for another day.

Then he had an idea. Most of the floors in Bag End were wood or brick, but the kitchen floor was covered with slate tiles, easily scrubbed and hard-wearing. Perfect.

"I know what we can do," he said secretively, leaning in close to Pippin as if someone might hear them and spoil their fun.

"What?" Pippin whispered noisily.

"Let's go in the kitchen, and I'll show you."

They went to the kitchen, pretending to creep past Bilbo's study so he wouldn't hear them. Then Pippin watched curiously as Frodo moved the kitchen table and the chairs into the corner, leaving a large cleared expanse of tiles. Perfect for a budding artist, and Pippin

could use up some of that energy in cleaning up the mess they were certain to make.

"What are we doing, Cousin Frodo?" Pippin asked.

"We're going to draw a picture on the floor, so Uncle Bilbo can see it when he comes in for tea," Frodo said.

Pippin's eyes brightened with excitement, but then the look faded.
"But Mama says not to draw on floors or walls," he protested.

"And Mama's right, when you're at home," Frodo said diplomatically, not wanting to cause trouble for Eglantine Took, who had enough to be getting on with, even before factoring in all the mischief Pippin got into. "But this is a special floor, here at Bag End, and we're going to draw on it with special tools. When we've finished, we can wash away the drawing and the floor will be good as new. How does that sound?"

"All right," Pippin said, nodding vigorously. "But- what do we use for paint?"

"I know what we can use. You stay here and think about what you want to draw, and I'll fetch it from Uncle Bilbo's study."

Pippin assented to this idea and Frodo left him pacing about the slate floor and muttering to himself, while he dashed down the hallway and tapped on the open door to Bilbo's study.

When his uncle looked up, he asked, "Bilbo, do you have any of that colored limestone left?"

Bilbo looked surprised at this, and slightly annoyed by the interruption, but he said, "I think so. Look over there," pointing at the chest of drawers where he kept paints and colored inks.

And chunks of limestone, dyed in every color of the rainbow and some that surely didn't exist in nature. They were nestled in their own box to keep the chalk dust from coloring Bilbo's other drawing materials, so Frodo seized the box, said a breathless, "Thank you," to his uncle, and ran back out of the room.

He was gone in a flash, too quickly to respond when Bilbo suddenly looked up from his book and asked, "Why do you need chalk, my lad?"

But Frodo was already in the kitchen. "Here's what we'll use for our drawing," he said, proudly displaying a handful of chalk to Pippin, whose eyes lit up.

"Chalk comes in colors?" he asked excitedly.

"Normally it's white, but this is special chalk, just right for drawing pictures," Frodo said, smiling at Pippin's enthusiasm. And such happiness over such a small thing! Colored chalk was rare in the Shire, since most people had no use for it, unlike the white version, which most children used during lessons. But it wasn't a rare treasure, or more valuable than gold, yet Pippin acted like it was, taking a few of the pieces out of Frodo's hand and considering them carefully.

"Can we draw ducks?" he asked.

Frodo laughed. Ducks again! Pippin had recently developed a liking for the ducks that lived on Bywater Pond, but only after realizing they were much friendlier than the rather hostile geese many hobbits kept. "Of course we can draw ducks. Why don't you make a little pond for them to live on? Yes, over there," he said, pointing, "and I'll start drawing a little village over here, far enough away so the hobbits don't bother the ducks."

The two cousins began by drawing a rather typical Shire scene, full of hobbits, animals, good food, and flowers, telling the story of the mural as it emerged out of initially vague shapes and little puffs of colored dust.

But the tale grew in the telling, as most tales do, and by the time Bilbo came in a hour later, seeking tea and a bite to eat, the little hobbit village had grown in size and was now being menaced by an elaborately decorated dragon. The ducks, of course, were left safe in their corner of the kitchen, unmolested by the fire-breathing beast.

Bilbo stood in the doorway for a moment, admiring his lads' artwork. Frodo was an excellent artist and, despite his age, Pippin had an aptitude for it as well. Bilbo smiled to himself as Pippin moved to the side and revealed a rendition of a tiny hobbit, facing down the chalk dragon.

Frodo obligingly added the hobbit lad into his story, saying, "And the brave Sir Pippin came forth to defend his village, saying to the dragon, 'Begone! We are hobbits of the Shire, peaceful and simple, and we have no treasure for you to steal. But we will see you off, with sticks and stones, if words are not enough!' Even though Sir Pippin was afraid of the dragon, he was determined to save his home and family, and was very brave to speak to a dragon like that, because, you know, dragons don't like being told what to do," Frodo said solemnly, then continued his tale, changing his voice to sound like Bilbo's own attempts rendering the speech of Smaug. "And the dragon said, 'Why, Sir Pippin, you are very brave to come out of your hole and speak to me. No other hobbit has ever dared to tell me to go away. As a reward for your bravery, I shall leave you and your family alone and fly far, far away to a place where there are no hobbits. Or ducks.' And he did, only asking that the hobbits give him some food to eat before he left, because, after a hundred years of sleeping on a pile of gold, even a dragon grows hungry!" Frodo said with a flourish as Pippin giggled. "Now, dearest, I think it's time for tea. Will you go and ask Uncle Bilbo if he'd like to join us?"

Pippin nodded and turned to go, then saw Bilbo standing in the doorway. "Uncle Bilbo!" he cried. "Come and see what me and Frodo drew for you!"

Bilbo smiled and allowed Pippin to take his hand and pull him further into the kitchen. "Did you draw all of these things yourself?" he asked, even as he distinguished between Frodo's practiced images and Pippin's rather messy creations.

"I drew the ducks!" Pippin said proudly. "And Frodo helped me with the dragon. There were lots of scales to color," he confided.

"So I see," Bilbo said. "And you used so many different colors; why, that must be the most colorful dragon in Middle-Earth!"

"What color was your dragon, Uncle Bilbo?" Pippin asked.

"Oh, Smaug was beautiful and terrible to look at," Bilbo said. "He was nearly covered with gold and jewels because, you see, when a dragon sleeps too long on his pile of gold, it begins to stick to him like armor. He was nearly as colorful as your dragon, and certainly more vain. Why, you should have seen him preen when I praised his looks, though to tell you the truth, he looked very funny with all sorts of golden objects hanging off of him- a crown stuck next to his elbow, a goblet poking out from between his shoulder scales, a jeweled necklace wrapped about one of his horns. It was a sight to see."

As he fell into the familiar rhythm of the story, the two lads hustled about, carefully wiping away their mural so it wouldn't be marred by scurrying hobbit feet. They erased the dragon first, prompting a triumphant squeal of, "Fly away, dragon!" from Pippin; then the village, because after all, no sensible hobbit would continue to live near a dragon's hoard; then the duck pond, once they'd decided the ducks had flown south for the winter. Bilbo watched, smiling, until there was a clear path to the tea things, then began preparing a proper hobbit tea for his lads. They were sure to be hungry after fighting a dragon, even if it was only one made of chalk.

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><p>Later that night, Bilbo was putting his teacup in the sink, intending to wash it the next morning, when a flicker of color on the floor caught his eye. He peered at the spot and chuckled softly to himself when he realized what it was, then blew out the lamp and went off to bed, looking in on the sleeping Frodo and Pippin as he passed by.</p>

Back in the kitchen, a tiny yellow chalk duck bobbed contentedly on a patch of blue chalk water, just waiting to be rediscovered the next day. And not by a dragon, no matter how colorful.

The End.

* * *

><p>AN: I suspect hobbits wouldn't have sidewalk chalk, per se, not having concrete sidewalks in the Shire, but I'm sure they'd have something comparable. Besides, it was cute.

Thanks for reading!

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